

Sunday, October 16, 2022— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 183 Pre-1611 Evidence for the Text: The General Meeting & The Notes of John Bois, Part 5

Introduction

- In [Lesson 182](#) we considered the interplay between the Bois' notes, the General Meeting, and the English readings found in the AV. Put another way, we considered what Bois' notes had to say about the discussions that transpired around the English reading of the text.
- We discussed the literary and auditory culture that characterized the English Renaissance of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobian periods in which the King James translators were reared. From John Selden's 17th century chronicle we observed that the final step in the making of the King James Bible was an audible read. It was at this juncture that the translators amended the text based upon the "Elizabethan Aesthetic" and how it would sound when it was read audibly.
- In his note on Hebrews 13:8, John Bois records Andrew Downes offering an alternative reading that "will be more majestic." (Allen, 87) Therefore, we concluded that the goals of the translators were as follows:
 - Translational Accuracy
 - Majestic English
- We observed statements from the pens of David Teems and Alister McGrath that implied that writing majestic English was accomplished by accident by the King James translators. While we understand their point, i.e., that writing quality English was a subordinate concern to accuracy in translation, the notes of Bois indicate that the translators were also concerned with the quality and register of the English text they were producing.
- Before moving off this topic, I would like to look at some of the comments made by Gerald Hammond in *The Making of the English Bible*, especially as they relate to the interaction of Bois' notes with the final English text of the AV.

The Making of the English Bible by Gerald Hammond

- The following are some quotations from Hammond that I found too good to pass up but did not fit neatly into the overall structure of the Lessons as I laid them out.
 - "The committee was not impervious to individual brilliance. [Ward] Allen shows how the completely new word 'amazement' was introduced into the Authorized Version's rendering of I Peter 3:6, at Downe's suggestion. The text reads, 'whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement'. As Allen notes, the translators' difficulty was to find a word better suited than the earlier versions' 'terror' or 'perturbation' to relate to any of the three possible objects of the verb—unbelieving husbands, the women themselves, or female ornaments. Downe's suggestion solved it ingeniously." (Hammond, 181)

- “. . . we should note Downes’s one other great contribution to the work of the revising committee, because it will lead us to a more general analysis of the translators’ practice—this was his readiness to explicate New Testament Greek by way of Old Testament Hebrew. There is a simple but telling example in the note on I Corinthians 9:8. The Geneva Bible had rendered the verse like this: ‘Say I these things according to man? Saith not the law the same also?’ This is Paul’s capping of a series of verses begun in verse 3, where he announces his defense to those who ‘examine’ his apostleship. As a summary of the defense, Geneva’s rendering of the verse—one which the Rheims agrees with—means that Paul is making a general comment on human affairs, one which the law supports. But the Authorized Version’s translation is subtly different: ‘Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?’ There is more antithesis between the speech of men and the words of the law here, and, equally important, ‘as a man’ relates to the way Paul has been talking, not what he has been referring to. We can see the genesis of the Authorized Version’s rendering if we look at Bois’s note, which says: ‘*after the manner of men*. Bederech bene Adam A.D.’ The English phrase is obviously Downes’s suggested rendering—one which the Authorized Version waters down a little—and ‘bederech bene Adam’ is his justification for it, the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek used here, an idiom whose translation would be ‘after the manner of men’.

Why this note is so typical of the notes as a whole is because, although it might conceivably have doctrinal implications, it is firmly based on the translators’ sense of language and style. The most striking things about Bois’s notes is the almost complete absence of theological comment. From beginning to end they are based on usage and context, grammar and etymology. This may, of course, be misleading. The original panels probably did argue long and hard over difficult doctrinal points, and the revising committee might have felt itself bound by their conclusions. Equally, Bois might have felt that the notes which posterity would see should reflect the translators’ doctrinal unanimity. Still, what we have stands as a monument to men whose interests were principally grammatical and stylistic.” (Hammond, 183-184)

- “A fair number of the notes relate to syntactic matters. There is, for example, a lengthy and complicated discussion of Galatians 2:6 which concerns the translators’ difficulties in coping with a phenomenon found in both New Testament Greek and Old Testament Hebrew, that is the failure of the writer to complete what he is saying. The Greek begins like this: ‘From but the-ones seeming to-be-something’. This is followed by a long parenthesis, and unexpectedly, no apparent attempt to complete the statement which had begun the verse. The Geneva translators assumed an ellipsis here, and they rendered the opening of the verse like this: ‘And of them which seemed to be great, I *was not taught*...’ But Andrew Downes disagreed with this and argued that rather than an ellipsis what the verse failed to do was to provide an apodosis: the length of the parenthesis leads the speaker to make a new beginning. The effect of the Authorized Version’s rendering, which follows this explanation, is to bring the verse closer to the sense of a man thinking and speaking:

But of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me.” (Hammond, 187)

- “. . . the most revealing thing about the notes is the testimony they bear to the respect which the translators bore for the whole English Bible tradition—in particular, for the Geneva Bible. There are several notes of detailed discussions of complex verses where, in the end, the existing English rendering is accepted almost unchanged.” (Hammond, 188)
- “Finally, Bois’s most common type of note is the shortest, but often the most revealing—if I have interpreted them right. Unlike the rest of his comments, they are entirely in English, and it seems safe to guess that they represent renderings which the committee had considered but which they ultimately rejected. If we consider examples from just one book of the New Testament, they will give an idea of the range of inferences which can be drawn. This is a selection from the first sixteen chapters of Revelation.

1:7 Bois note: ‘with the clouds, or, in the clouds’

AV rendering: ‘Behold, he cometh with clouds’

By suppressing the definite article—and thereby choosing Geneva rather than Rheims, the alternatives of the note are both included, that the clouds are a manifestation of God’s coming and a shrouding of his presence.

2:3 Note: ‘and thou hast borne (a burthen), or, thou hast borne a burthen

AV rendering: ‘And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured’

Earlier versions had overcome the difficulty of rendering a transitive verb which here had no object: Rheims had made ‘for my name’ its indirect object—‘and hast borne for my name’; Geneva had used an intransitive English verb—‘and thou hast suffered’. Bois’s note suggests two ways of smoothing over the harshness, either signalling the omission by interpolating the object, or, going further and assuming that the Greek verb legitimately meant ‘bear a burden’. But the Authorized Version chooses neither, and stands as the most abrupt—and most literal—of the English versions.

6:6 Note: ‘for a testor A.D.’

AV: ‘for a penny’

The Greek is *denarius*. Downes’s ‘testor’ is not so literal (*d* as the abbreviation for an old penny came from *denarius*) but it represents Jacobean values better—a testor was equivalent to six pence. The committee chose a rendering which went back to Tyndale, thereby ignoring any attempt to give the verse a contemporary relevance.

7:15 Note: ‘He shall pitch his tent over them, he shall protect them, he shall dwell with them, he shall rest upon them, shall rule over them.’

AV: ‘and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them’

Bois’s first suggestion is probably the most literal. The note testifies to the range of possible renderings which the committee considered: in the end they chose the least figurative, and the one which went back, by way of Geneva, to Tyndale.

10:9 Note: ‘and it shall offend thy belly’

AV: ‘and it shall make thy belly bitter’

The opposite to the previous note. The committee consider a more abstract rendering, but they reject it because they need ‘bitter’ to contrast with what follows: ‘and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.’

11:17 Note: ‘and hast entered thy kingdom’

AV: ‘Saying, We give thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.’

The note expresses some uncertainty about the temporal emphasis of the last phrase; either the perfect tense is dangerous because it implies a completed action, or the translators feel that the context requires a parallel to the preceding clause, i.e., another expression of taking power. Geneva had translated it ‘and hast obtained thy kingdom,’ but the bare past tense, as in the Rheims rendering, is the one the revisers chose. Like many of these examples it indicates a confidence in a literal translation rather than an explicatory one.

14:8 Note: ‘of the venomous wine A.D.’

AV: ‘because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’

Downes’s interpretation of the Greek word is probably the more accurate: John is describing a poisonous liquid. But the committee prefers to follow the earlier English versions in the more expressive mingling of wine, anger, and fornication; and they choose to retain the Hebraic ‘of the’ structure rather than use one or two adjectives.

16:19 Note: ‘or, so that he gave her’

AV: ‘and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup’

Bois's note is followed by the 'sub. hoste', i.e., a Greek subordinating conjunction ('so that'). But the revisers prefer the more Hebraic infinitive, as had the Geneva and Rheims. (Hammond, 189-191)

- "In introducing these notes I regretted that they did not fulfil Pollard's prediction that they might lead us to see the successive stages of translation [Hammond is referring to the following statement from Alfred W. Pollard, "If the notes which Dr. Boys treasured so carefully to the end of his life had been preserved, it might be possible to trace, if only for a single section, the work done at the different stages of the revision." (Pollard, 60)] That was too bleak, for, with a little guesswork, it is possible to trace some of the stages of discussion which went into the making of the Authorized Version." (Hammond, 192)
- While we do not disagree completely with Hammond's observation in this last citation, we must remind our readers that Hammond was operating with a misconception regarding the importance of Rule 1 (See [Lesson 137](#)). Earlier in *The Making of the English Bible*, Hammond stated:
 - "The Authorized Version translators' problem was quite straightforward. Their brief was not to make a new translation but, as far as possible, to base their work on the existing English text; and this, for James, the piper calling the tune, was the Bishops' Bible. Hence came the first rule laid down in the list of the those "to be observed in the translation of the Bible:"

The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.

But the pressure for a new translation had been an essentially puritan one, led at the conference by John Rainolds, in the belief that the existing versions 'were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original.' Both in answer to this call, and from their own scholarly abilities, the Authorized Version translators knew that the Bishops' Bible was the most corrupt and the Geneva Bible the least; and if they were to use a copy text, making a good one better, then this good one would have to be the Geneva Bible. Further down the list of notes, at number 14, there was an order whose strict interpretation would inevitably result in a Bible closer to Geneva than to any other:

These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.

In essence this rule, and not the first, was the one the translators followed, and the Geneva Bible, not the Bishops' Bible, became the foundation of the Authorized Version." (Hammond, 144)

- Hammond appears not to have perceived how the other work-in-progress primary sources (MS 98 & Bod 1602), when used along with Bois' notes, work in concert with one another to offer a more complete picture of the various stages of the work. While this is a weakness in Hammond's analysis, his observations are nonetheless exceedingly valuable.

Conclusion

- Chapter 4 of Dr. David Norton's 2011 publication, *The King James Bible: A Short History From Tyndale to Today*, is titled "Working On the King James Bible". In this chapter Dr. Norton has a subsection titled "Manuscript Work and Notes" in which he surveys the three primary work-in-progress documents (MS 98, Bod 1602, & Bois' Notes) that we have been studying in this class. At the very end of Chapter 4, Dr. Norton stated the following:
 - "Looking back over the evidence for the making of the KJB, I think the good luck of having as much as we do outweighs the regret that we do not have more. We know much more about the KJB than about any previous version, and it is worthwhile reflecting that Shakespeare scholars would be delighted to have even a single autograph manuscript of one of his pages, or a printed text that he himself had supervised. That so much survives is partly testimony to the grandeur of the scheme initiated by King James. Involving so many people, some of the considerable fame outside of their participation in the translation, it was always likely to leave more historical traces than any other version. Moreover, in spite of the modesty exhibited by many of the men who were, after all, merely revising many good previous versions, the occasional sense of pride epitomized in Samuel Ward's declaration, "I was a translator", shows that there was some sense that this was a special work. This sense contributed to the survival of treasures such as Bois's notes." (Norton, 110)

Works Cited

Allen, Ward S. *Translating for King James: Notes Made by a Translator of the King James's Bible*. Vanderbilt University Press, 1969.

Hammond, Gerald. *The Making of the English Bible*. New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1983.

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